

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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MISS LATIMER OF BRYANS.

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CHAPTER XXV. A RESOLUTION.

THE next day found Lucy Thorne in one of her severest moods. Long before Geoffrey came down, he heard her scolding the servants in different directions. Immediately after breakfast Mr. Thorne and his eldest son escaped to their farm affairs, banging doors behind them with even more energy than usual.

Geoffrey went off to smoke in the garden. He walked up and down between the long, straight borders, in summer so gay and sweet, now made tidy and dismal for winter, though a rose still lingered here and there. One lovely bud, shading from rosy copper to cream, held up its head among the shrivelling leaves of a bush near the kitchen door. Geoffrey looked at it, smelt it, and finally broke it off and stuck it in his button-hole. At the same moment Lucy appeared at the door. Her square face was set and stern; she gave one sharp glance at Geoffrey and the flower, then looked round the garden, seemingly in search of somebody else to scold.

"Lucy," said her brother, "come here and take a turn with me. I want to talk to you."

"I have no time to waste on your nonsense," said Lucy; but she came.

"I have been thinking of what you told me last night," he said, as they paced along the gravel path together.

"I know you have," Lucy answered. "And I wish you would stay in bed to

think, instead of walking about over my head until I don't know what time. Especially as you can do no possible good by thinking."

"I have come to a conclusion, Lucy, and I want to tell you."

"Well?"

"I feel sure that there cannot be the smallest grain of truth in what you hinted to me last night."

Lucy gave a short laugh.

"Yes," he went on, "the thing is an absurdity. You asked me if I liked Captain Nugent. Well, he is not a man I ever could like much, even if—I don't quite know why; he is not my sort, that's all. He has always been civil and nice to me, though. But don't you see that the very idea of his—of his flirting with that girl, or even admiring her very much, makes him out the most utter fool, as well as the most awful scoundrel. A man doesn't calmly go in for breaking his own neck in that sort of way. Don't you see, he couldn't expect such a thing as that to be kept secret long. It's not like poor girl; he might be a brute in that way, but hardly such a hopeless fool. And think of all the circumstances."

"Circumstances don't always alter cases," muttered Lucy.

"Besides, it was only the day before yesterday—that afternoon—that I saw them out in the pony-cart together. They were driving after the hounds all day. If ever two people looked happy together, they did. He is not worthy of her; nobody thinks him so; nobody could be. But he is not deceiving her to that extent. He must care for her, you know. He is not such a brute, such a fool, such a false, degraded—well, I refuse to believe it, that's all. Look here, such a story

ought to be crushed at the very first breath. It is absolutely unbelievable, and it must not be allowed to get about the village. Do you hear?"

"I hear. But how am I to stop it, pray?" said Lucy crossly, yet a little impressed by his tone. "If five shillings only set Stokes's tongue wagging, five pounds wouldn't be likely to silence him."

"Stokes is a fool. Why, he is a good sort of fellow, not at all the man to be bribed. No; if you want to convince him that his precious ideas are founded on fact, that is the way to set to work. Tell him and his wife not to make such fools of themselves. Say that if he is curious, he had better ask somebody who knows where Captain Nugent was coming from when he met him at the gate. Tell him, if you like, that I know."

"But, Geoff, you don't know."

"I shall know. I shall ask Mr. Cantillon. Do you suppose such abominable nonsense is not going to be stopped?"

"Stokes saw him in the road, after he had left Mr. Cantillon."

"Well, I shall find out something, if I have to ask the man himself."

"You actually don't believe it then, Geoffrey? You don't believe it at all? You don't believe even that he stares at Maggie Farrant in church, I suppose?"

"Of course not; is it likely? Cannot you understand what I say? I don't believe one word of your miserable village scandal. Nor would any one in his senses, I should think."

Lucy hummed a tune as she marched along beside him.

"It would be rather dreadful for Miss Latimer, certainly," she said after a minute's silence, "if such a report ever came to her ears."

"Impossible! It could not. Don't mention her name," exclaimed Geoffrey.

"If you would allow me to speak, I was going to say that it would be quite as dreadful for the other girl, supposing there is no truth in it. When you go in for saying that Captain Nugent is incapable of being such a fool, such a brute, and so on, you might also find a good word to say for her. It would be almost as bad in her as in him."

"Quite as bad, and she is even more incapable of it. Yes, and you would think so, if she had ever talked about her friend to you. Poor girl! If I have not deserted her, it is because I never felt it necessary. If there could be any truth in such im-

possible nonsense, it might be that the man admired and persecuted her, but as for his having any encouragement — no, Miss Farrant would soon show him what she thought of him. Besides, it would make her most awfully unhappy, worse than she is now, poor girl."

"Is she unhappy now? When did you see her?"

"The other day. I thought she did not look bright. I dare say she misses Miss Latimer a good deal, and that old man must be wearing to live with," Geoffrey answered, much more quietly.

Lucy was clever enough to ask a sharp question, but not to understand the sudden ceasing of his excitement, or to know that her question suddenly roused him to caution in speaking of Maggie Farrant, or, further still, that it was like a quick, positive little touch of an icy finger on his heart. His mind full of anxiety and indignation for Poppy in her lover's suggested falseness, he had indeed almost forgotten Maggie's unhappiness — that strange, sad figure he had seen at the gate. Of course that sight was among the things that lay in the background of his mind — those hidden, unconscious causes which have so great an influence. Something was pushing him on to all the angry unbelief he had expressed that day — something which, if fairly looked at, might have been found to be what these things so often are, an argument on the other side. It had come forward now and touched him, and Lucy did not know at all why the flush faded from his face, why his eyes grew dark and thoughtful, and he walked along looking on the ground.

"You like that girl," she said sharply.

Her temper was by no means sweet that morning.

"Of course I do," he answered, in rather a slow and dreamy manner. "Nobody could help it, I should think. She is very sweet and very pretty."

"Oh! Never heard you say so much before. When did you begin to think so?"

"I don't know. When I was making that drawing of her, I suppose."

"Dear me! Very sweet and very pretty! How nice! Well, Geoff, it wouldn't be much trouble to tell your fortune. Old Mr. Farrant confided to father, weeks ago, what a lot he thought of you. No trouble in that quarter. If the girl wants consoling, you had better console her. Besides, see what a beautiful plan it is, my dear. You would take her out of

everybody's way, and we need not run about contradicting scandals any more. There! Put that in your pipe and smoke it. What can a man want beyond 'very sweet and very pretty'? What else in the world matters, I should like to know? And a good charitable work into the bargain. There, Geoff. Go and see her this afternoon, and give her my nice rose which I saw you steal."

Geoffrey took all this quietly. He appeared to be only half listening to Lucy's "chaff," which was of a kind not uncommon at Sutton Bryans.

"Oh, do you want your rose?" was all he said.

"No, boy. Keep it, bless you. I like to see it where it is," said his sister, who had now chattered herself into a better humour. "Good-bye. I can't waste any more time with you. Look here—don't worry about all that nonsense. I'll tell Annie Stokes what you say, and frighten her a bit. Don't go asking questions of Mr. Cantillon; it would bother him awfully, and do no good, I dare say."

She hurried away down the long path, and Geoffrey saw no more of her that morning. She spent it industriously, driving her men and maids hither and thither with all the practical energy of a former generation. He, loitering under yellow or leafless trees in the orchard and garden, dreamed away the hours like any idle young man of to-day, who thinks himself, perhaps, a genius misunderstood. Sometimes, as on this November morning, Frank Thorne, the farmer, the man knowing in horses, could find no words to express the sad extent of his contempt for Geoffrey. Even his father, when they met at dinner, wondered that the fellow was not out hunting on such a splendid day. He and Frank were kept at home by business, but while Geoffrey could ride, there was no reason why all the horses should be eating their heads off in the stable.

In the afternoon Geoffrey walked off to the village without speaking to any of them again. He felt miserable, anxious, and lonely; restless, eager to do something, yet not knowing what to do. He thought that Porphyria might as well have let him go to Spain. He was of no use here, to her or to anybody else. The only pleasure left in life, of course, was to see her sometimes; yet was it a pleasure really worth having, worth being called so, when in spite of all one's struggles after unsel-

fishness, pain and heartache would have the best of it so often? And now, if he had stayed at Bryans to see the ruin of her happiness and the breaking of her heart! For though Geoffrey assured himself that there must, could, should be no truth in that village story, it made him uneasy in the very depths of his being, and weighed on his imagination like a bad dream or a thundercloud.

Mr. Cantillon's study seemed to be the best place to get rid of worrying fears and fancies, and there Geoffrey found himself sitting near a bright fire, later in the afternoon. The fog of the morning had cleared softly away, and the sun had come out, yellow in a pale and misty sky, with banks of purple cloud lying behind the woods, which shone against them light gold. The sunshine was so soft, so unobtrusive, that Mr. Cantillon did not even think of protecting his books by pulling the blind down. He sat in his usual corner, with his back to the light, and there was the slightest touch of impatience mixed with his benevolence as he looked at Geoffrey's face opposite. It was a pity, he thought, that this fellow, with all his manliness and courage, could not possess a better fund of cheerfulness. He loved him, but sometimes he was a little angry with him. This afternoon he had some excuse, for Geoffrey had interrupted him in the middle of scribbling down a kind of sketch of what he might, perhaps, one of these days, be able to say to Fanny Latimer. Her picture seemed to smile more charmingly than ever, while he looked at her and wrote. Then the paper had to be dashed into a drawer, and the Rector, with cheeks slightly flushed and hands a little trembling, had to turn round and receive Geoffrey.

Now that he was there, the young man did not seem to have much to say. As to breaking out upon the anxiety that filled his mind with doubt and confusion in spite of himself, that was quite impossible. He saw that there had been much good sense in Lucy's last words to him that morning, advising him not to bother Mr. Cantillon. Not without better reason, certainly. Lucy generally carried out what she undertook, and she would probably succeed, if she set about it in earnest, in nipping the keeper's gossiping imaginations in the bud. The thing was too serious, tremendous, terrible, to be mentioned to Mr. Cantillon without absolute necessity. That might arrive, if it were true. Till then such an

unnatural possibility must not be connected with Captain Nugent's name, or with poor Maggie Farrant's.

But Geoffrey could not help thinking about it, and this gave him a queer appearance of absent-mindedness, almost of sullenness, in the eyes of the Rector.

"You did not come here to talk about the weather, Geoffrey?" said Mr. Cantillon, after a few uninteresting remarks had passed between them.

The touch of impatience about his eyes and mouth found its way into his voice now, and startled his visitor.

"Am I disturbing you, Mr. Cantillon?" he said, standing up.

"No, my dear fellow. Sit down. I am as idle as yourself," and the Rector gave a faint sigh. "I wonder you are not out with the hounds to-day," he said. "What are you doing? Drawing? You find some pretty sketches about Sutton, I should think."

"I didn't care to hunt to-day. No, I have not been drawing," answered Geoffrey.

Then he was silent. The Rector squeezed up his mouth and looked at him oddly.

"Pity her majesty did not let this fellow go to Spain," he thought. "Why did she want him dangling here? That plan of hers and Fanny's will never—" but then Geoffrey interrupted him in a manner which made him smile, by speaking of the very person who was in his mind.

"I have not seen you since the day before yesterday," he began. "Do you remember, I met you as I was riding home, and I asked you to look out for some one at the avenue gate?"

"To be sure. Of course I remember."

"And do you mind telling me—was it—was I right, I wonder? Afterwards I thought it was hardly possible."

Mr. Cantillon hesitated a moment; he could not help it. He felt bound in honour to the girl who had poured out her trouble to him, and he quite saw that that trouble—in present circumstances at least—was no business of Geoffrey Thorne's. And yet something made him feel that it would be better to trust Geoffrey—better for the girl that he, who had seen her in that strange state of grief, should know what was the real reason of it.

Only the day before, Miss Fanny Latimer and Mrs. Nugent had had tea with the Rector, and these two match-making women had again returned to the subject of Maggie Farrant and the marriage

which was to be wished for her. Fanny had positively declared that Geoffrey Thorne by his admiration had made old Mr. Farrant, at least, pretty sure of his intentions. He had told Poppy so, she said. Mrs. Nugent had harped on the string of Maggie's really unfortunate beauty, and the possible foolishness of Arthur's friends. She really did not see, she confessed, how dear Poppy, with every wish to be kind, could have that girl at the Court if there were people staying there. Even Arthur, she saw, thought it a little awkward yesterday.

To this the Rector had replied that Captain Nugent had expressed some sympathy and interest about the girl.

Oh, no doubt that was very possible. Dear Arthur was so good-natured, so amiable, and so ready to make all Poppy's friends his own.

In answer to a direct question from Fanny, the Rector had said that he had seen no sign at all of Geoffrey Thorne's special admiration for Maggie Farrant. On which he had been crushed by the smiling remark:

"Then, Henry, I really think you have been a little blind. You don't wish it, and so you won't see. I can't think why you don't wish it, when Poppy does, and she knows them both better than you do."

The Rector shrugged his shoulders and made her a bow.

To-day Geoffrey's questions were making him think that possibly the eyes of these ladies might have been better than his own. Fanny's influence with him was great, and he could not, of course, deny that for Maggie her plan was excellent. Only—Geoffrey and a girl like that! Geoffrey, whose secret he knew! Was such a descent possible? The Rector was too romantic to think it.

He felt, however, that it was best to be quite open with him, and therefore, after a minute's thought, he said very gravely:

"Well, you know, I am sorry for poor Miss Farrant. She is not very wise, I dare say—a little morbid—but after all she is very young. Poor girl, almost a child, we must remember. And Miss Latimer has been so much to her. On Maggie's side, at least, it has been one of those friendships which seem to want a stronger name. And now she fancies she has lost her. One sees both sides so well. Yes, it was she, poor girl. There she was at the gate, her one idea to catch a sight of Porphyria

as she drove through. It affected me very much, I must say. She talked to me frankly, poor child. I tried to persuade her to go home. Afterwards they overtook her, and brought her up to tea at the Court while I was there. But even then she did not look happy."

"She has altered a good deal, I fancy," said Geoffrey in a low voice.

"Yes, in the last few weeks. She took it remarkably well at first, not really realising the change. And I don't think any of us have taken the trouble of realising it for her. There is something a little peculiar, you see, in the whole position."

"I see."

Geoffrey's face was half hidden by his hand as he leaned forward, staring into the fire. Mr. Cantillon, lying back in his chair, lowered his eyes slowly from the ceiling to Fanny Latimer's portrait. The sun shone in softly, the fire flickered; there was stillness and peace in the quaint little room, in the old house by the quiet road, where nothing ever passed but a carriage driving to or from the Court, or a cart from an upland farm. It was a wonderful atmosphere for thinking things over, for coming to calm and deliberate conclusions, away from the hurry and pressure of common life.

Geoffrey's next remark was suggested by thoughts which Mr. Cantillon did not in the least understand. Oddly enough, however, he had something in his mind which matched them, and therefore he was quite ready with a suitable answer. Also, being a little preoccupied, the strangeness of the young man's suggestion, coming from him, was not so great as it would have seemed to most people.

"Ever since I knew Miss Farrant," he said—"I mean, of course, since she grew up—I have felt somehow that she was in the wrong place. It's a pity, isn't it, for people to be put where they can't stay? Of course I know the friendship has been everything for her; but it does leave her out in the cold, and then"—he paused—"how is she ever to be satisfied with any other kind of life? Her queer old home may be all right enough; but by-and-by, when the old man dies, I don't quite see what is to happen. She is too pretty to be thrown on her own resources, and—after all this—perhaps she ought to marry a gentleman, and won't."

"No, no; that is what we all feel," said the Rector hastily. "I assure you the thought of her worries us all. I believe

it is a real distress to Miss Latimer. And her aunt is most anxious, most kind—partly for the girl's own sake, partly because it really does weigh on her niece a good deal. It is all a natural consequence—nothing more. But there is another consequence that Miss Frances Latimer is a little afraid of. There will be some young men coming down shortly—friends of Captain Nugent's—to shoot, you know, and so on. She says she cannot have Miss Farrant at the house then. Considering what young men are, and that everybody seems to think her so amazingly pretty, and that one fears, not being the wisest of young women, she may be ready to snatch at any amusement that falls in her way, perhaps to flirt a little—well, I dare say they are right. But, poor girl, it will be the first time in her life that she has been left out, and I am afraid she will feel it. But they are right—they are right. By-the-bye, do you think her so amazingly pretty?"

"Yes," said Geoffrey in the same quiet tone, still gazing into the fire. "Yes, most unusually pretty. A foreign type of face. Not less interesting for that. I don't see why she should not be thought on a level with Captain Nugent's friends."

The Rector started. He had talked on, as his way was with a person who inspired confidence, quite forgetting that this person's views might be at all different from his own. These last words of Geoffrey's seemed suddenly to remind him of what the young man's good sense and tact frequently made him forget—that he was not talking to a "gentleman." Instinctively he pulled himself up; and his manner took the faintest shadow of caution and distance, hardly noticeable by any one who had not known him all his life.

"It would not be possible to ask her to meet them," he said.

Then his natural goodness conquered; he laughed, and looked kindly at Geoffrey.

"After all, Miss Maggie's fate is not in your hands or mine," he said. "We may trust these ladies to take the right course. Miss Latimer is fond of the girl, and certainly will spare her any disappointment she can. In fact, I know she has thought a good deal about her future."

He stopped short. If Geoffrey had been looking up, the Rector's expressive face might have told him something he did not yet know. But he did not look up. Mr. Cantillon fancied that his dreams were of

pity for Maggie Farrant, and thought that Fanny had been right and himself wrong. In truth, Geoffrey needed no assurance of Porphyria's goodness. What filled his thoughts was a far more obstinate doubt. Was her own future so happy, so sure, that she could afford to waste anxiety on that of her friend? And could anything be done to remove the danger, to bring the wrong right? He hardly knew how he felt, or what he would do.

Mr. Cantillon watched him with a certain wonder. He could not at all make out what was in his mind. He could not believe what had at first occurred to him, that some sordid feeling of class animosity was setting Geoffrey on the side of the Farrants against his old loves and admirations and sympathies. It would be very possible, in a man of the Thorne stock—yet he could not believe it of Geoffrey.

"You have a pretty bud there," he said at last, as the young man remained silent. "A late Gloire de Dijon, is it not?"

"Yes, I think so," said Geoffrey, suddenly getting up.

He seemed to have nothing more to say. He had not gained much, perhaps, by his visit to the Rector; only a clear view of the anxieties of the Court respecting Maggie Farrant. They were fairly real anxieties—worries, rather; yet they seemed very childish and futile, compared with those fears that obstinately lingered with him, growing in strength hour by hour, in spite of his own indignant language to Lucy.

"We have been talking like a couple of old women," thought the Rector when he was gone. "But he is a safe fellow, poor Geoffrey. I wonder, now—but no, no. Very sorry, Fanny, but he is a thousand times too good for that poor girl. The saving of her, of course—but no, he never will. How could he?"

And turning again to his writing-table, Mr. Cantillon took out the sheet of paper which he had so hastily hidden. Looking it over, his eyes and mouth softened into their sweetest smile. What would Fanny say?

He had wasted half an hour scribbling down a few more thoughts that occurred to him, when he heard a step in the garden passage, which was followed by a knock at the study door. With an impatient sigh he threw his paper back into the drawer, and called out: "Come in." The sun was just gone behind the southwest line of woods, and twilight was steal-

ing into the low room, where the fire, too, had died down from its former beauty.

At the Rector's voice Geoffrey Thorne came back into the room. He would not sit down. He looked very pale and much agitated. The hand that Mr. Cantillon kindly took was as cold as ice.

"My dear fellow, what have you been doing?"

"I am going to do something," said Geoffrey, smiling faintly. "I have been down there on the bridge, making up my mind, and now I have come back to tell you."

"It is something desperate," said the Rector. "What do you mean? Don't do it, for goodness' sake!"

"Not at all desperate. I think it may be a good thing." Again he looked hard into the fire, turning his face away from his friend. "I am going to ask Miss Farrant to marry me."

"Geoffrey!" cried the Rector. He choked, his voice shook, and tears blinded his eyes. "What? Why? My dear good man, why are you doing this? Is it a sudden idea? Take care, take care. You may be acting most unfairly both to her and yourself. You don't really care for the girl. You are doing this out of pity. It is a tremendous mistake. Don't do it, Geoffrey. I solemnly beg you, don't do it."

"My reason is not at all what you think," the young man answered. He seemed to gain coolness and firmness from the Rector's agitation. "Don't worry yourself, sir. It will be all right. I have other reasons which I cannot explain. Only I want you to tell me one thing. You said that Miss Latimer had thought a good deal about her friend's future. Do you think this would please her or not?"

"Please her! She and her aunt have wished it for months," said Mr. Cantillon with rash truthfulness.

He would have given something to recall his words, and even began to contradict them as he watched Geoffrey's face and saw it flush suddenly, then grow pale, and harden into still firmer resolution.

"Very well," he said, without listening further. "Thank you. That is what I wanted to know. I may, perhaps, please her then. But it is quite likely that I shall be refused."

Mr. Cantillon shook his head. He did not think it likely.

"You are doing a foolish, romantic

thing," he said. "Sit down and talk it over. Stop—where are you going?"

He followed his visitor down the passage, and even to the end of the garden. But Geoffrey was beyond his overtaking. He might have been hurrying to the highest joy on earth, so quick were his steps over the bridge and along the road, so eager and hurried was the hand that pulled the old clanging bell at Church Corner.

"MY PRE-EMPTION."

A WESTERN SKETCH.

"WILL you be afraid to do it?" asked my brother doubtfully.

Now, as a matter of fact, I was afraid—horribly afraid; but, equally as a matter of fact, I was not going to say so, and fervently declared over and over again that there was nothing I desired so much in the world as to go and "pre-empt" on the hundred and sixty acres of creek land that bordered our ranch.

As it was, the two boys had taken up all the land they were entitled to—had pre-empted, homesteaded, and taken up a timber-claim. But this hundred and sixty acres still remained—a sort of Naboth's vineyard—just at the end of the ranch. All our ready money was gone in the improvements we were obliged to make, and we could only just command the dollar and a quarter an acre required for pre-empting. But the question was, who could pre-empt?

The land hunger was strong upon us all. It seemed a thousand pities that, lying next to the ranch as it did, this piece of land on Cherry Creek should belong to any one else. In fact, it became a sort of ever-present nightmare. Nowhere, would the boys declare, could such alfalfa be grown fit to cut twice, nay, three times, a year; nowhere could a finer corn patch be planted; nowhere was better irrigation to be had. All the evening they had been talking of ways and means without ceasing. And only that morning, as I drove into the town with the cream, had I heard one of them say, as they watched me safely across the Santa Fé track:

"If only we could pre-empt over again," to which the other, being a fellow with a great faculty for silence, laconically replied: "You bet!"

In the creamery I met some friends,

and one of the girls began talking of her pre-emption, and then, turning to me, asked if I had concluded to take up land, and in answer to my question: "Can girls pre-empt?" they all burst out laughing.

"Sakes alive! of course they do. Why, Maisie here and your friend Ella both pre-empted when they were twenty-one, and I guess you are that."

"But—but," I faltered, "you have to live on your land for six months, build a shanty, dig a well, and do fencing; how can a girl do all that?"

However, they one and all declared it was easily done, done every day; as for the loneliness, one need only sleep there, and spend the day where one pleased, adding:

"Laud sakes, you English girls are so fearsome. Who would harm a woman alone on the prairie?"

This was kindly and indulgently said; but, somehow, I did not like to hear it. What an American girl could do an English one might find courage for, I thought, and—the boys did want the land so. The end of it all was that in half an hour I was walking out of Burt Harris's office, having enrolled myself as an American citizen, and taken up my hundred and sixty acres, Judge Craig, as I paid over the necessary fees, saying: "I con-gratulate you, ma'am, on being a citizen of this free and enlightened country, an' I du allow," he kindly added, for we were great friends, "that this Republic is to be con-gratulated as well."

So I drove home, my pre-emption deed in my pocket, looking around me with new eyes on the cultivated land as I passed it. That was a fine field of alfalfa, certainly; but the boys had said that the best alfalfa about could be grown on my pre-emption.

All that afternoon I said nothing, in fact I had no one to speak to till we met again at supper-time, half-past six; and when that was over and the boys had lit up, I took out the deed and laid it on the table. It was after he had read it that my brother asked if "I was not afraid?" and I had answered in the negative with a high-handed assurance I was far from feeling. For the glamour of the land which had been strong upon me all the afternoon, was departing with the sun, and I was only feeling how dark and lonely it would be far out on the prairie, with not a human being within call for many a long mile.

But it was my own doing, and I had

burnt my ships behind me, knowing well as I did that the boys could not be with me, but must stay at home with the animals. It would be well enough during the greater part of the day, for they promised to come over each afternoon and have supper with me, and although I knew this would entail extra work upon them, I am afraid I was selfish enough to accept their offer.

"And I tell you what it is," said my eldest brother, who had been silently smoking for the best part of the time, "you shall have Rorie and the cart all to yourself, and then you can ride or drive home whenever you want to."

This, I felt, was a great concession. Rorie, of course, was mine, but to be allowed the cart as well, and the boys to be content to drive into town on the buckboard! We all had our own horses, but the dog-cart—no buggy, if you please—was joint property, and my horse, who was a broncho, had been trained to draw it. I did feel pleased, for the two things I liked the best in our rough-and-tumble life out west, were Rorry and the baking. Washing tired me frightfully, so did sweeping, but the cooking I liked, and the sight of the sweet crusty brown loaves coming out of the oven was a real pleasure to me. And as for Rorie, when once I was on his back, I was in possession of a new sense, and all the minor worries of the day were things of the past, as we "loped" happily along together. He was such a clever horse, too: could turn on a sixpence as the saying was, after a cow brute; never trod by any chance on the prickly cactus, which almost carpeted the ground in parts; never wanted to be led to a bluff or fence for mounting, but would let me get off the ground on to his back.

So it came to pass that one fine day the beginning of May found us progressing in the waggon towards the land I had taken up. The boys had already built a one-room frame shanty for me, and a stable for Rorie; the doors and windows for the same, which you buy ready made, were piled in the waggon, together with the stove, bedstead—or rather springs and bedding—the cooking utensils, consisting of a kettle, frying-pan, and saucepan, crockery of various kinds, and table, and two chairs, knives, forks, etc., a ham, a bag of flour, and another of potatoes, besides eggs and canned meats and fruits. We started directly after our twelve o'clock dinner, and came in sight of our destination about three.

The tiny shanty looked fearfully lonesome with no window or door, set down by itself in the middle of the wilderness; but the creek at a little distance behind it seemed home-like, at least so I thought, little guessing the trick the same creek was about to play me shortly.

In less than no time, for so it seemed to me, the boys had the doors and windows in, the stove fixed up, and the kettle boiling for tea, or rather supper. There was no biscuit to make, for I had baked a big batch of bread only that morning, and brought a couple of loaves along with me. The coffee was soon made; the cow—for I was to have a cow—milked, and we had supper ready: cold beef, cucumber, potatoes, fresh bread and butter, and a can of peaches.

Then, the meal over—and it seemed that no one ate anything that evening—the boys brought in the rest of the things, tied up the cow at one end of the frame shed and Rorie at the other, put the cart in shelter, got me a couple of pails of water, brought in all the cut wood and pitch pine for kindling, said, "Good-bye, old girl, take care of yourself; we'll be over to supper to-morrow," jumped into the waggon, and I was sadly watching it, as it became less and less in the distance. Then, I am ashamed to say, lovely as the evening was, I went indoors, bolted the door safely, flung myself face downwards on the bed, and cried. It was all so dreadfully lonesome.

However, I had luckily just sense enough left to know that if I worked myself up into a state of nervous excitement, there would be no sleep for me that night, so I presently dried my eyes, unbolted the door, and looked around.

All was so vast, not a living thing in sight, all rolling prairie, bluff upon bluff, and at the edge of the horizon the foot-hills shut out everything but the snowy peaks which rose far above them; and in the silence and solitude of that great prairie my little shanty and cowshed looked spicks. This would never do, I knew; I should only get more frightened at my loneliness; I must find something to do, and I determined to pass the time by making a fresh jar of yeast, as there was only about a cupful left from my last baking—just sufficient to leaven the jarful. So I went to the potato sack, and very soon had a saucepanful on the fire; and as the way we made yeast in the far West may be found interesting, and I can vouch for the

quality of bread it made, I will give the recipe, as it was given to me by the wife of one of the oldest settlers in the country. Some people always used the German cake yeast, but to my mind at that high altitude it made the bread too dry to eat after a couple of days' keeping; others, again, put hops, which grew wild in the creek, into their home-made yeast, but we much preferred, after trying them all, our own recipe, which kept good for months, only requiring, about three or four times a year, a cake of Warner's yeast to be added to it, to freshen it up.

When the potatoes were thoroughly cooked, we drained the water off, and set it aside, and then proceeded to mash the potatoes in the saucepan, using for the process a smooth, strong glass bottle. Of course, one ought to have a pestle and mortar, but I had no extra luxuries in the way of cooking utensils. When the potatoes were thoroughly mashed, a full tea-cup of powdered white sugar was added—castor sugar was the best we could get—and well stirred in, and then the same process was gone through with another cupful of sifted salt. By this time the mixture was lukewarm, as was also the water in which the potatoes had been boiled; this was now poured on to them again, and the panful beaten up briskly for a few minutes, and then the whole mixture put into the yeast jar on the top of what remained of the old yeast. It was then set aside for half an hour upon a part of the stove that was fairly warm, and at the end of that time it would foam up and run over the jar. And it was then fit for use, and only needed to be kept in a cool place with a lid on.

About a big cupful would make a baking of six loaves, and delicious bread it was, sweet, crusty, and nutty. It was best, however, if your water was hot enough, to scald the flour before adding the yeast, taking care it got quite lukewarm before you put it in.

I used to make dreadful mistakes at first, for owing to the altitude at which we lived, it was not enough for water to boil, to be at boiling point. If when we saw the steam coming out of the spout of our kettle, and heard the water bubbling, we thought we might venture to make our coffee, and boil our eggs, we found ourselves greatly mistaken. It took five minutes in what we at home called galloping boiling water to cook an egg lightly, and as for coffee, it had to boil,

and boil, and boil, before it was ready for clearing.

By the time I had finished my yeast, and went to the shanty door to look out, the last ray of the sun had disappeared behind the range, leaving no twilight; but a clear, cool radiance was overspreading the heavens in another direction, and in a minute or two the moon came up, almost as light as day. I could see to read even in the shanty by it. With it, too, sprang up the cool breeze we always got about nine p.m., making sleep possible, however hot and sultry the day had been. I could open the fly-netting door of the shanty also, and the door of the animals' stable. And we all enjoyed the cool, sweet breeze; even old Mischief the dog, who had up till now been lying lazily in the shade of the shanty with his tongue out, too hot to stir, came to my side and nestled against my knee.

How long we stood there enjoying the evening I cannot say. I only know we were aroused by a prolonged and melancholy howl coming across the prairie, and answered, after a moment's silence, by another howl from beyond the creek. Mischief began to growl, and sniff uneasily, and I started up. It was time for us all to go to bed; the coyotes were roaming round. I hastily bolted the cow-shed, called Mischief in, and shut myself up for the night, turning up the lamp as I did so. It seemed a more human and comforting light than that of the cold moon outside, somehow, and having laid the fire and filled the kettle, I wound up my watch, for no one would come out there to ask for the tax on it, I felt sure; undressed with great rapidity, and went to bed, fully expecting to lie awake all night. But Fate was kind to me, and in a very few moments I was fast asleep. When I woke up it was broad daylight; the sun was streaming in through the chinks of the rough shutter, and for a moment I gazed around me in surprise. "Where could I be, and why had not the boys called me long before?" And then I realised that the dreaded first night on "my pre-emption" was passed, and I got up with much joy. Rorie and Daisy were restlessly moving about next door, but old Mischief lay quite still by my bed, his grey muzzle tucked away between two shaggy paws, and his one eye—for the poor old fellow had lost the other in a fight in his long-past youth with a coyote—warily fixed upon a stray sunbeam as if he anti-

cipated danger from that source. I felt hungry, too, for it was long past the time for my first cup of tea. Alas! here there were no boys to boil the kettle; clearly if I wanted tea I would have to get it myself.

I jumped up, put a match to the pitch-pine kindling, and flung the house open. Then I put on my bathing-dress, stuck an ulster on over it, and went and milked Daisy, had my tea and some bread and butter, took hold of Rorie's halter and went down to the creek for my tub. This proceeding saved walking for one thing, and gave the horse his morning drink for another; so Rorie kindly took me upon his back, and with old Mischief by our side, we walked quietly towards the creek.

It was a lovely day, as usual at that time of the year, and the prairie was covered with flowers, from the bright orange-and-red cactus blossoms, which grew in great patches of colour all around, to the pretty pink but scentless dog-rosses on little bushes not a foot high, whilst down by the creek sunflowers of all sizes, a kind of pale blue foxglove, and the azure larkspur, stood out well against the light green of the cottonwood trees.

Rorie soon had his share of water, and then I waded up from the point I had watered him at to find a hole big enough to bathe in. The water was clear and cold, coming down as it did straight from the mountains; but it was also very shallow, a mere stream in its sandy bed, just over the ankles, and it sent the blood rushing up into one's head in a very unpleasant manner. However, I was soon lucky enough to find a big hole, quite deep, by the side of a huge stone which had evidently been washed down from the hills by some freshet, and here by sitting down I was up to my neck in water, and, after a good ducking, began to enjoy my bath, in spite of the wretched water-snakes, who speedily found me out and writhed all around me. But they were perfectly harmless, and, when once one got used to the unpleasant feel of them, not to be dreaded, although I must own I always had more or less the greatest dislike to the creatures. They were really, we were told, more water-sels than snakes; indeed, some friends of ours cooked them as such, but the same people were very adventurous in matters of food, and declared prairie dog was as delicate as young chicken. It may have been, but I cannot speak from experience.

Whilst in the water, I was much in-

terested in the proceedings of a young chipmunk—a pretty little animal something like a squirrel, with a long bushy tail, very cute-looking and friendly. He had bars of golden brown and black across his back, the red of a robin on his shoulders, a jauntily cocked-up tail of a pale brown, and very bright watchful eyes. Whenever I gave a splash he would pretend to be frightened and trot off a yard or so, then sit up on his haunches and regard me warily, stroking his nose with his fore-paws as he did so.

The blue birds and the robins also came to have a look at the strange creature in the creek, the latter being like its English namesake in everything except size, where it certainly scored, being a most enormous bird, almost as big as the domestic fowl.

My morning's bath being over, I rejoined Rorie and went home and dressed, made my bed, tidied up, had breakfast, and gave the animals theirs, and then got the water for the day from the creek, a matter I had reason to congratulate myself upon before the day was over. Then, for it was still early, I saddled Rorie, and he and I had a lovely two hours' ride up the creek.

It was too hot everywhere else, but in the sandy bed of the creek there was shelter; for its banks, with their cottonwood fringe, were far above us, and kept the intrusive sun at a respectful distance. We were riding lazily along and meditating, for it was now past eleven, the necessity of turning back, when we were startled by an explosion far away up the mountains, that sounded as if a cannon had gone off. Could they be blasting for gold, I wondered? But Rorie gave a sudden start, and before I could rein him up, headed away from the creek, loped up its banks, and made for the shanty as fast as he could go. Wise Rorie, he had heard that sound before; he knew there was a freshet on, and the creek would boom in a few moments.

And as I turned round in the saddle I saw before me an immense wave of brown water come rushing along the bed of the creek, carrying everything before it, down from the cañon. The creek, which had been a mere silver streak, low down in its sandy bed, was now a brown rushing torrent, level with its banks, all the cottonwood trees swaying before it, their leaves in many cases torn from them by the violence of the stream. Down with it,

too, were whirled cedar trunks and roots of old pines from the mountains, with what looked like the body of a dead animal, surprised whilst sleeping, whirling over and over in the flood, whilst countless blossoms of all the pretty flowers, draggled and torn into fragments, lay helpless on the top of the stream. Rorie was trembling and so was I, but it all happened in far less time than it takes to write about it.

More heartily than ever did I wish for the boys, for if this had happened whilst I was bathing, well, there might have been another body besides that of the dead coyote rolling over and over in the flood. All that day long the brown stream had a certain fascination for me; it made me feel somehow more lonely than ever. I ate my midday meal mechanically, but about five I roused up; the boys would be with me in an hour's time, and they should have a nice meal. So I lit my stove and prepared supper, thinking as I filled the kettle how lucky it was I had fetched plenty of water.

How thankful I was when I saw the white tilt of our prairie schooner making its way across the bluffs! I would coax the boys to spend the night in the waggon, I thought, and so they did when they saw what had happened; and by sun-up the next morning the creek, though full and rapid, was fairly clear.

After that I spent many another night at the shanty, and got quite callous over it in time.

We built a corral, and fenced and dug a well, and finally, to my great joy, I "proved up," and we were the proud owners of two ranches. But even now I shall not easily forget the first night and day I spent alone on "my pre-emption."

JASMIN : THE BARBER, POET, AND EMINENT PHILANTHROPIST.*

NOTE.

A GENTLEMAN of Bordeaux, who frequently met Jasmin, writes to us as follows of the poet and his work :

Of the genius of Jasmin—like that of Talma, for instance—a great part died out at his death. Read even in translations, his poems are fine; read in his own language, they are finer still; but they well-nigh reached perfection when heard

from his own lips. The poet really seemed to be transfigured when reciting; such was the spell which his emotion imparted to his utterance.

Vanity in Jasmin was oddly mixed with modesty, and simplicity with pride. When well advanced in years, he retained all the freshness and enthusiasm of youth. Unspoiled by success, he yet loved to be applauded, even by a child, and was visibly affected when he observed among his hearers a young girl moved to tears. Ever open to the claims of charity and friendship, his ear was over-sensitive to a whisper of rebuke. When I twitted him one day for losing his temper with a critic, whom he had almost literally taken by the throat, "C'est surtout ma langue que je défends," he cried, "c'est ma mère, ma mie, ma fiancée, ma femme, ma fille, ma gloire, toute ma vie, que sais-je!"

Another time, when talking with some very well-read people, whom he had delighted by reciting a new poem, he rather startled them by saying: "True, I have but a peasant's pipe, but I make better music than your 'grands joueurs de lyre.' Lamartine and Victor Hugo are a thousand times more clever in conventional word-sounding. But do the people care to hear them? My Muse is far truer to nature, for hers is the tongue of those who are nature itself. Yes," pursued he, warming, and as he gave voice to it, there was poetry in his prose, "Aques grans moussus (ces grands messieurs) are mounted upon splendid steeds, with wings like those of Pegasus to soar into the heights, where haply few can follow them. I have but a sorry nag (un trois de chibal), but he carries me through all the roads that lead straight to the heart."

In person Jasmin was neither an Adonis nor a Hercules, although fairly well-featured, high of forehead, broad of chest, and strongly built. He seemed rather high-shouldered, and though brisk of step was clumsy in his gait. Excepting that his eyes were extraordinarily bright, you might perhaps have thought him a heavy-looking man; nor was there any brilliance in his ordinary talk.

But when he recited, he became quite a new creature. His stature seemed ennobled, his gestures full of grace. His eyes shot forth their tender rays or flashed their fiery flames and even lightnings as he spoke. His voice sighed, sobbed, whispered, sang, or thundered like an

* See pages 441 and 461.

orchestra—a symphony of sound. Seeing him, and listening well-nigh spell-bound by the magic of his tones, you never thought, as of an actor, "how well he plays his part." No, Jasmin was not an actor, but a poet, a creator. When hearing him recite, you seemed to be assisting at the birth of his ideas, and witnessing their growth into poetical development. As the words rang in your ears, their true feeling touched your heart. They thrilled your inner being by their passion and their pathos, their tenderness and truth.

I have heard Jasmin recite in public and in private; in the theatre or drawing-room; to an audience of peasants, or an intimate society of persons highly born. The effect which he produced was invariably immense; the emotions he elicited surprisingly the same.

THE ZITANA.

"Go not into the wild Basque land,
The wrinkled gipsy said;
The Vega lay 'neath the sunset's smile,
The snow-clad peaks flushed red,
Under the mighty elm-trees' shade,
Where Boabdil's soul bewails
His bitter loss, 'mid the rippling songs
Of a thousand nightingales;
The Spanish girl stood, shy and scared,
And over the slender hand
The gipsy bent and muttered low,
As the rosy palm she scanned,
"Go not into the wild Basque land,
Shun the Biscayan shore;
Or the stateliest house in Grenada left
Will be desolate evermore."
She told her father of the bode,
And he smiled in haughty scorn;
She had never a mother to hush her fear,
She died when her babe was born.
She told her lover of the bode,
And he kissed the little hand,
And swore he would guard her wanderings,
Though she sought earth's farthest land.
And while the great elms swung o'erhead,
And nightingales sang their fill,
Love drew his wing on the troubled heart,
And its pulse grew calm and still.
Yet, or ever the summer fleeted by,
Where, under the sapphire skies,
Over the bright Biscayan seas
The wild Basque mountains rise;
Where under sunny Biarritz
The long waves thundering shock
Breaks over many a rugged isle,
And many a caverred rock;
Caught in the undercurrent's clutch,
Tossed in the deadly swirl,
The sea swept out from the golden sand
A fair young Spanish girl.
And the father, whose helpless agony
Had watched the hopeless strife;
The lover who strove so desperately
To snatch her back to life;
As they knelt beside the sweet, pale corpse,
When they'd decked her for the tomb,
Remembered with a shuddering sigh
The grey Zitana's doom.

AN INDEFINITE ARTICLE.

A COMPLETE STORY.

IT was not often that I gave advice to my friend Jameson. I did that much once, however. It was when he was in love.

Frida Langton was the girl's name, and he was growing desperate about her. He came into my rooms so often, and gave me the benefit of his views on the case so repeatedly, that at length, against my better judgement, I was obliged in mere self-defence to do something for him. For a wonder, I got him to listen to me one day and gave him my views.

Jameson, as I very well knew, was only afraid of Miss Langton's father, a wealthy but grim old gentleman, who would be highly indignant at the thought of bestowing his charming daughter upon a struggling journalist—as Jameson was. He thought Jameson a sufficiently agreeable and amusing young fellow—which meant that Jameson laughed at all the old gentleman's jokes, and very bad ones they were, with immense heartiness. Perhaps Jameson must be forgiven for this weakness under the circumstances.

The two young folks—I speak as a fog of thirty-five—understood one another perfectly. If only the parental consent could be obtained!

"It seems to me," said I—to go back to the giving of the advice—"that there is a surprising lack of courage nowadays among the youth of these realms, if you are a fair example of them. Now, if I were in love with Miss Frida, I should go and make a neat speech to old Langton—"

"No, you wouldn't," said Jameson decided.

"Setting forth," I continued, without noticing the interruption, "my strong points, and carefully keeping my weak ones in the background, or, better still, omitting any mention of them whatsoever. I should point out that my present position as a writer of light articles for the 'New Gazette,' although not in itself one of great emolument or glory, was likely to lead—in time—to something very good indeed." Here Jameson grinned. "I should then," I continued in a judicial, Master-of-the-Rolls-like manner, "make an attack upon his feelings, pointing out the—a—the genuine affection which existed between his daughter and myself, and the danger, the imprudence, and, you might

also add, the wickedness of placing any bar, or shall I say any obstacle——”

“Look here,” broke in Jameson irreverently, “this is all very fine. I can make up speeches in my own room by the dozen, but that’s a very different thing from standing up in front of old Robert Langton and delivering them. As for writing him a letter—I’ve written ‘em by the dozen and torn ‘em up again.”

“And then you always commit yourself by a written document,” said I, “whereas—— by Jove, I have it !”

“Well ?” said my friend, with his glum face turned upon me, expectant.

“Here you are,” said I, “always bellowing out for subjects for your articles, and here’s one ready to your hand whereby you may earn money and do the engagement business at a stroke.”

“I don’t quite see,” began Jameson, looking at me with his doubtful Scotch countenance.

“Why, man alive, the thing’s plain. Write an article setting forth your own case—you can do that easily enough—and work on Robert’s feelings that way. You know he always reads the ‘New Gazette.’ Let him see himself as others see him, and show him what’s expected of him. Head it ‘Sorrows of a Lover,’ or something of that sort, and, of course, make the parent cave in and bless the two young folks. Dwell on the depravity of mixing up money and love, and cruel bars to pure affection, and so on—and the thing’s done. By Jove, my boy, I’ve put money in your pocket.”

To this day, I cannot say whether I made the above remarks seriously, but certainly Jameson took them that way. He shook my hand warmly, said he could never thank me enough, and hurried away to think it over.

The next day when I was sitting over a peaceful pipe, in rushed my friend, thrust a manuscript into my hand, and gasped—my stairs are very steep—“Read that !”

I did, and it certainly was very good; Jameson could do a thing of that sort very well. Old Mr. Langton, from what I knew of him, was sketched to the life.

“Bravo !” I cried, as I threw down the sheets, “that ought to do your business, my boy.”

I could see that Jameson was pleased with his own performance, but he asked in an indifferent tone: “Do you think it’s good ?”

In due time that article appeared in the “New Gazette,” and in the interval Jameson had, so he told me, let Miss Frida into his secret. Both the young people awaited the result with great eagerness. Jameson used to call at the Langtons’ as often as he dared, for he was a timid youth in those days; and on the evening when “A Warning to Parents”—which was the title of the article—appeared, I urged him to go and glory in the success of his own handiwork. He was afraid to do this, but he promised to let me know the result as soon as he could.

I had to go into the Midlands for two or three days, perhaps a week, during which time I forgot all about Jameson and his affairs; but as soon as I got back to my chambers both he and they were speedily brought to my knowledge. I was informed that my friend had called two or three times to see me, and I was not surprised, therefore, when he bounced in that evening in his usual impetuous manner and more out of breath than ever.

“Look here !” he burst out—and then I regret to say he used a bad word—“you’ve got me into a pretty mess !”

I begged him first to calm himself and then to explain himself. With the first end in view I pushed the tobacco towards him and declined to hear him further until he had lit up; then I asked him to proceed.

It appears that Mr. Robert Langton had duly received his “New Gazette”—containing the “Warning”—and, as was his custom, that light and airy journal was read aloud to him after dinner by Miss Frida. It was this young lady who had supplied Jameson with all the particulars of which he was now giving me the benefit.

Miss Frida, of course, when she came to it, gave due effect to the “Warning,” which she read to the best of her ability. She made a point of losing her place in the middle, so that she might glance up and see how the choleric old gentleman was taking it. To her great delight his face was wreathed in smiles.

“Go on, my dear,” he said. “Very good—very good !”

This was capital, thought Frida, and she proceeded with great unction; old Langton punctuating with chuckles.

When she had finished, the old gentleman slapped his leg with delight, and burst into a roar.

“By George, it’s capital !” he cried,

"capital! A wonderful portrait! Ha, ha, ha! Don't you recognise it, my dear? Surely you must recognise it?"

Frida began stammering that she didn't know whether—

"Why," broke in the old gentleman, "it's your uncle George, to the life. Never saw anything like it. Some one's been taking observations, that's very certain. You don't mean to say you don't see it? Why, if any one had read that to me—I don't care who or where it was—I should have said at once, 'That's George Langton, and by some one who knows him well.' I shall get another 'Gazette' and send it off to him marked in blue pencil. Finest thing I ever saw in my life!"

This was the first I had heard of Uncle George; but it appeared that there lived at Leamington—so Jameson gloomily informed me, and he had but within the last day or two himself been made aware of the fact—a brother of Mr. Robert Langton, and the very counterpart in every respect of Miss Frida's father. Their intimate friends and relatives, with that kindness only found where true affection exists, called the two gentlemen respectively Tweedledum and Tweedledee, and I regret that I have forgotten which was—dum and which was—dee. The Leamington man had, strange to say, an only daughter, the single point of difference being that he was also blessed with a wife, whereas Robert was a widower of twenty years' standing.

Miss Frida—to resume the narrative—who had been quite hopeful while the reading of the article was in progress, was utterly aghast with her parent's wrong-headed conclusions. She dared not, however, hint at the truth, although she tried to persuade the old gentleman that it was unnecessary to communicate in any way with Mr. George, "even if it were worth while," she said; "they will be sure to see the 'New Gazette' at Leamington."

"Not they," cried Mr. Langton; "they see nothing in those benighted regions."

Not to waste time over it, he sent off his own paper that very night, first scoring a thick blue line all round the article, and further, as having doubts of brother George's intellectual acumen, and in direct contravention to the postal regulations, he scrawled underneath, completely obliterating a paragraph about the plague of rats in Lincolnshire:

"What do you think of this? How do you feel, eh?"

The old gentleman chuckled over this master-stroke of wit long after the paper was sent to post.

"It's perfectly plain to me," he said to Miss Frida. "I suppose you don't see a thing quite so easily as we men do; but it's perfectly clear to me. There's some one wants your cousin Edith to a dead certainty, and the old boy won't let 'em marry. I can see it all. They've got a friend on the Press to state the case, and very well stated it is."

Poor Frida was afraid to say a word, but waited with great unhappiness for the next thing to happen.

The next thing that happened was that a furious letter came from her uncle George. I saw it afterwards; it ran as follows:

"DEAR BROTHER,—Have received newspaper containing scurrilous article. Shall commence proceedings against 'New Gazette' for libel forthwith. If you recognise me in that outrageous description, that is sufficient evidence. The license of the Press nowadays is frightful; but they shall smart for it. I will have heavy damages or my name is not—that of your indignant brother—

"GEORGE LANGTON."

"The worst of it is," said Jameson gloomily, when he had reached this point in his narrative, "he has really written to the office of the 'New Gazette,' and made no end of a bother. Of course the old duffer's threat of action is ridiculous; but, nevertheless, it has got me into a fearful row with the editor, for I had to confess all about the real reason of the article."

"Very unfortunate," I interjected.

Perhaps Jameson thought I was too placid about the affair, for he burst out with great bitterness into a perfect denunciation of my well-meant advice, pointing out that not only was he involved in his present difficulty, but that his original state, re Miss Frida, was in no wise improved.

"There is only one thing to be done," said I, when Jameson had exhausted himself. "The time has now come when you may make, with great advantage, a clean breast of the whole thing, and state your views with regard to the young lady to Robert Langton with more effect than you could ever have done before." I gave this second piece of advice quite calmly and without being in any way

ruffled by my friend's hasty words. I told him he would regret them when in a calmer frame of mind.

Far from receiving my remarks with gratitude, however, and, to outward appearance, with no appreciation of my forgiving spirit, Jameson actually had the effrontery to say that, as I had got him into such a mess, I had better get him out of it myself.

Finally, after many failures on my part to make my friend see reason, I did, in a moment of weakness, consent to accompany him to the Langtons' that day and see what I could do for him. Thus did I repay good for evil. It was like Jameson to take my services as a matter of course.

We had arranged to meet at a certain hour, and go down together to the suburb where the Langtons lived. The time fixed was four o'clock, when Jameson was to call for me. He did not come, however, and after half an hour's waiting I concluded—he is of a very nervous and fearful temperament—that his heart had failed him.

Now, I have no wish to boast, but I do not hesitate to say that nine men out of ten in my place would have been only too glad to be relieved of the disagreeable duty in prospect, and would have considered themselves, and very reasonably, free from any further responsibility in the matter. But that is not my way of looking at a solemn promise and a solemn duty. I felt also that I should possibly state the case to better advantage if I were alone. Consequently, without further delay or debate in my own mind, I took train, and arranged on the way down what I was going to say.

I knew the Langtons' address, and I walked along the road where they lived, taking my time about it, and taking more and more time as I got nearer and nearer. Nothing is worse than to rush in upon people in a flurried or heated state.

All journeys and pilgrimages have an end somewhere and somewhere, and at length I reached the house itself—a very comfortable-looking place, standing in a good deal of ground. I identified it by its name—a long one which I have forgotten, but something like "Phantasmagoria," I think—which appeared in gilt letters on the gate-post.

There is nothing like proceeding with caution: and before I walked up the path I took a survey through the shrubs, feeling rather uncomfortable and guilty, as though

I were planning a burglary, and quite pleased that neither Policeman X nor any other observer was in sight. What I saw was a tennis lawn with two elderly gentlemen upon it engaged in the game. One of these, doubtless, was Mr. Robert Langton, and the other—ah, now I began to understand about Tweedledum and Tweedledee—was his exact counterpart. Which was Robert and which was George I did not know, but the nose of one was somewhat redder than the nose of the other. I decided that George was the man of the excess of colour. Perhaps I did so—who can tell?—because my explanations were to be made to Robert, and a red nose sometimes means temper.

Both the old gentlemen were dressed in flannels, and being of stout, short build, the exertion of the game—the rushing to and fro, the scoring, the disputations, last and least the batting of the balls—caused them to puff and gasp a good deal. They pursued their game, however, with immense vigour and without a pause.

Which was just where my difficulty came in. Of course I saw at once the immense advantage of explaining such business as mine to a man in flannels, whereas I was dressed in immaculate black clothes, especially when my news might make him angry. He would be simply nowhere as regards the amount of dignity he could command. I had been fearful of finding Mr. Langton in broadcloth, sitting up in his library like a Lord Chief Justice. I was not going to miss such an opportunity as this. I would say my say out here in the garden.

Unfortunately the game went on without intermission. I stood glaring through the shrubs for I know not how long, waiting for the combatants to propose an armistice, sink down upon the garden seat, and mop their heated brows with their handkerchiefs; that would have been my time. But no. They played as though their lives depended upon it, and I was in despair.

Suddenly the "casus belli" arose through the action of a third party. This was a small boy of great depravity and of predatory instincts. There can be no doubt that he had crept into the garden under cover of the shrubs before my arrival, and having grabbed the flowers he was after, had caught sight of me watching on the outskirts, and dared not rush forth. Doubtless he thought I was inspecting him all the while.

He would appear, however, to have got as tired of waiting as I did, for he must have suddenly made up his mind to run for it. The fates were against him. As he made his sortie, both I and one of the old gentlemen caught sight of him simultaneously.

The tennis-player threw down his racquet and roared "Stop thief!" while I, turning in at the gate, was just in time to catch the culprit. The boy struggled, then burst out blubbering, cast his geraniums to the ground, and gave himself up for lost.

I led him in triumph up to the master of the house—who was he of the red nose, after all, so that I was disappointed—and felt that I had accomplished my own introduction capitally. We all three admonished the boy, waved a possible police station and attendant horrors before his terrified gaze, and prophesied gallows generally. The prisoner wept piteously, but preserved his presence of mind sufficiently to give a wrong name and address—as was subsequently discovered. We decided to leave the question of his reform to his own conscience, and so dismissed him. I have reason to believe that his tears were speedily dried, and that he regained his usual health and spirits pretty promptly, for I could almost make affidavit that it was that very boy who nearly put out my eye with a tip-cat when I was going home.

The "juvenile offender" being disposed of, I introduced myself as Jameson's friend, and, quaking, prepared to enter upon the subject which had brought me into Mr. Robert Langton's presence. The nearer I got to it the less I liked it. What was Mr. Robert saying?

"Now that that young ruffian has been the means of giving us the pleasure of making your acquaintance, we shall hope," etc., etc.

Then the temptation came upon me—why say any more? My presence is evidently sufficiently explained, and really Jameson did not do the right thing in leaving me to come here by myself.

I said I was only too happy—and had an engagement—and—and must go.

"Wait a bit," said Mr. Robert heartily. "Here's Jameson with my daughter."

I looked up towards the house, and there, sure enough, I saw my friend coming down the steps with such a charming girl that I quite envied him. But what in the world did the wretch—i.e., my friend, not Miss Frida—mean by his presence there?

It was Mr. George—he of Leamington—who enlightened me. He chuckled, winked mysteriously, and whispered:

"They're just engaged; you must congratulate 'em. We've all done it."

That miserable Jameson had actually come down early; had explained everything—just in time to prevent Mr. George from committing an assault and battery upon the person of the editor of the "New Gazette," for which ostensible purpose he had come to London—and had finally been forgiven, and received as a son-in-law "in spe." He had given me all that trouble for nothing. That is just the way friends serve you. Never trust a man who's in love.

STREET ACCIDENTS.

As the vessel that is continually taken to the well is sure to be broken at last, so with most people who go to and fro among the crowded streets of our large cities there arrives sooner or later the experience of a street accident. However sharp-sighted you may be, however nimble, there is your fate lurking for you at some street corner, or, more probably, at some street crossing. There the accident is waiting for you, something mild it is to be hoped—nothing worse than a sprain or a bruise in its result, and although it may involve a good deal of loss or suffering to the victim, with that it ends, and does not even find its way as a statistical unit into the annual report of the Chief Commissioner of Police. For with most sufferers their chief anxiety is to escape from public attention, and, like the wounded beast, to carry their hurts to their own particular den, while, in a general way, the notion of obtaining any compensation for their injuries must be dismissed as out of the question. It was Lord Westbury, that balefully brilliant Lord Chancellor, who, when his horses ran away in a crowded thoroughfare, pleasantly adjured his coachman, "Charles, pick out something cheap," an injunction which Charles obeyed with equal sangfroid by smashing into a manure cart. But it is a different matter to be oneself run down by "something cheap," though, indeed, whatever the position of the owner of the vehicle that knocks you over, unless the driver is very flagrantly breaking the rules of the road, there is very little prospect of getting any satisfaction.

Let us say that it is a hansom cab

that, rushing round a corner, immolates an unlucky foot-passenger; will the driver pull up and await identification as the author of the catastrophe? He may if there is a policeman there to stop him, and in that case the policeman will take down the number of the cab and the number of the driver's license. In this case we will suppose that there are witnesses to the fact of the furious driving, and that it turns out that the proprietor of the cab, who has been readily found from the police register, is a man of substance. Yet it would be rash to suppose that the sufferer's process will necessarily be successful. That particular cab might be proved to have been in quite another part of the town, and with a driver of a different number altogether. No! we may leave alone these light Cossacks of the streets. It is the heavy vanner who ought to be the most careful, for he is more easily caught and brought to book. As an example of this may be recorded the experiences of a lady revealed to the present writer as he was losing his time within the precincts of the Law Courts. Mrs. A—— was knocked down by a van crossing the footpath from a "porte cochère"; she was laid up for three months, at the end of which time she was able to go in a cab to see her lawyers about the accident. In returning to her home her cab was run into by another heavy van, when she was struck by the pole of the vehicle, and afterwards carried insensible to the hospital. She recovered substantial damages in both cases, although they were contested with determination; but it required an exceptional woman to go through the ordeal of being fought over by half-a-dozen medical specialists.

But it is with the social and not the legal aspect of street accidents that we have to concern ourselves. The safety of street travelling everybody is interested in, for it concerns probably all the members of the household, and especially in London. In the morning its inmates separate gaily enough, they disappear, some of them, in the great wilderness of London, the huge city with its labyrinths and pitfalls, its prowling robbers and stealthy assassins, its great roaring palpitating mass, out of which people draw their daily bread as out of a myriad-mouthed furnace. Meantime the house at home goes on its quiet daily track, and one by one the inmates reappear. And so it goes on till one day perhaps some one goes out who does not return. Then follow weary hours, perhaps

days of torturing suspense, while the fate of one beloved is hidden in the profoundest mystery, not the least happy solution of which, perhaps, is a notice from such a hospital that such a one has been brought there seriously injured by a street accident. Should it happen that there was no certain indication about the sufferer of name and address, the period of suspense may be indefinitely prolonged. So that among the minor duties of life it may be said that one not immaterial is to go about provided with some unmistakeable means of identification; such as German soldiers carry in a tablet, like a locket, suspended round the neck.

The chances of receiving injury in a street accident are not so remote as might be imagined—and in London especially, with increased and more rapid movement of vehicles, and greater throng and hurrying to and fro of multitudes, the number of accidents increases in an alarming ratio. Already the quota of accidents to life or limb occurring in the streets of the Metropolitan Police area far outnumbers the accidents to passengers travelling over the whole of the immense network of railways of the United Kingdom. The Board of Trade Reports for the year 1890 show the number of accidents to railway passengers as one hundred and eighteen killed and one thousand three hundred and sixty-one injured; while the last annual report of the Chief Commissioner of Metropolitan Police gives a total of street accidents for the year 1891 of one hundred and forty-seven "killed in the streets," and five thousand six hundred and thirty-seven persons "maimed or injured in the streets." Although the percentage of killed to wounded may seem happily small in the latter case, yet it must be remembered that the ultimately fatal results of accidents would not be included in the police return of "killed," which means killed on the spot, and while railway accidents of the slightest character are sure to be reported, many accidents escape altogether the knowledge of the police.

That the risk of street accidents is an increasing one is evident also from a comparison with the returns of former years. In 1881, with a population in the metropolitan area of, roughly, four millions seven hundred and sixty thousand, one hundred and twenty-seven persons were killed, and three thousand four hundred

wounded in the streets. Comparing these casualties with the totals given above, and bearing in mind the increased population of, roughly, five million six hundred and thirty thousand, as shown by the last Census returns, it will be seen that while the population has increased by little more than eighteen per cent, the number of casualties shows an increase of over sixty-five per cent. To this alarming increase of street accidents many causes have contributed. The extensive repairing of the streets with wood and asphalt makes them, if far pleasanter, yet still more dangerous for the pedestrian, to say nothing about the poor horses who suffer and perish unheeded. With a sharp frost, or after a gentle rain, the streets form one prolonged glissade, along which horses are slipping and sliding, and continually falling, and where the foot-passenger ventures at imminent risk to life or limb.

As might be expected, our friend the Cossack, perched upon his hansom and driving like Jehu, anyhow with all his might, is one of the chief enemies of the pedestrian. He is responsible, taking the police returns for 1891 as a guide, for some eleven hundred out of the five thousand odd of the year's casualties. Even more deadly, however, is the light cart of commerce, the butchers, bakers, green-grocers, all the light transport, in fact, of the London commissariat. This flying brigade is responsible for nearly thirteen hundred of the yearly accidents. Next to these, if paraded in order of demerit, comes the heavy van, of which many hundreds turn out every day, their drivers looking out for jobs at docks and wharves and markets, and wherever there is a chance of getting a load. As their earnings depend on the celerity with which they can renew their loads, naturally they do not lose time on the way. Add to these the railway and carriers' vans that dash through the streets at full speed as night comes on, and luggage trains are being made up and loaded with bales and crates and packages innumerable. The heavy goods van, avoiding the busy thoroughfares and passing through the poorer quarters of the town, is especially deadly to the children who make the streets their playground, and to the swarms who, on their way to or from the Beard School, dart joyously among the traffic and hang on jubilantly to passing vehicles. Vans score over eight hundred casualties during the year, and if we take

covered vehicles of the same class we may add six hundred more.

Omnibuses and trams together come a long way after these, with a low score, considering the numbers they carry, of about five hundred; and broughams and private carriages are credited with over four hundred accidents. Next to these comes in the cycle, with exactly three hundred and thirty-seven sufferers, of whom it is, however, only fair to suppose that the cyclists themselves formed a considerable part. For one melancholy satisfaction in being run over by a cycle is the consideration that the executioner probably suffers as much as his victim. But the above total is significant when compared with that of ten years previously, when only thirty-seven accidents were reported, and shows how the cycle is establishing itself as a regular component of the crowded traffic of the streets of London.

But it is satisfactory to find that although the number of sufferers by street accidents has largely increased, the means of affording them early attention and medical aid have not been lost sight of. The Society of St. John, whose head-quarters are in Norfolk Street, has done much in the way of training young people in ambulance work, and in affording "first aid" to the injured, and it appears from a recent report that over twelve thousand persons have attended the Society's classes, and acquired some knowledge of the treatment of accident cases. Many of the police, too, have gone through a similar course, and are able to give skilful aid to the wounded. But the chief agent in providing material aid to the sufferers is the "Street Ambulance Branch" of the "Hospital Association," which is supported entirely by voluntary contributions, and which mainly owes its existence to the munificence of a London merchant. There are now about fifty ambulance stations in the metropolis, with the means of conveying sufferers to the nearest hospital. The sum of about a hundred pounds will start a new street station in any part of the metropolis, and for those who have found wealth and honour in the midst of the traffic and turmoil of the great city, no better thank-offering could be devised.

This last Society has a room at Norfolk House, Norfolk Street, in the same premises where the Ambulance Department of the Metropolitan Asylums Board has its offices. This is a municipal organisation, with very

perfect and extensive means at its command. It is in telegraphic and telephonic communication with every part of London, and has well-equipped ambulance stations in every quarter of the metropolis. But its action is restricted entirely to cases of infectious disorders. The machinery is there, fully capable of dealing with every kind of casualty, epileptic fits, sudden illness in the streets, as well as every description of accident; but owing to the curious limitations and divisions which still prevail in the local government of the metropolis, the usefulness of this really fine and well-ordered staff is confined entirely to cases of infection. Public opinion would require that a different class of vehicle should be used for non-infectious cases, although the ambulances are so thoroughly disinfected after each case that there would be little real danger in their use. But with a considerable outward difference in the two classes of ambulances all mistrust would be allayed, and we should have a well-equipped ambulance at call in any part of London, and for any emergency. And that is a service that is due to the citizens of such a municipality as that of Greater London.

But, after all, better than all the cares that can be lavished upon one when injured, is it to be saved from injury altogether. It is not of free choice that we rush in among the hurly-burly of vehicles, among the cries and confusion and bewildering tumult of a great crossing. The old lady wants her dividends from Threadneedle Street, and must needs hobble through that whirling maelstrom of traffic. Yet, perhaps, this particular carrefour, although the busiest in the world, is not the most dangerous, or anyhow its dangers are well known, and our old lady is prudent enough to wait for convoy. A policeman spreads his arms—those City police are especially the friends of the weak and aged—the traffic is stopped on either side, and a little knot of people hurry between. It reminds the old lady of the prints she used to admire in her youth, where the Red Sea is piled up on either hand, and no sooner is she safe on the refuge, than Pharaoh and his hosts stream past with a vengeance. But young Brown, the bank clerk, who has to reach the clearing house in three minutes, dives in and out among the horses' heads, and gets off with a few contusions.

There are the old pensioners, too, who resort to the city once a quarter to visit

the hall of their company to receive their allowance, to drink a glass of wine with the clerk, and crack a good old joke or two with the beadle, and who would not for worlds miss any item of the programme. What Providence is it that watches over these poor infirm creatures in the swirl of all this bustle? But they rarely come to harm, while the poor old colonel who draws his half-pay at Whitehall is knocked over at the foot of King Charles's Statue. Or it is an M.P., perhaps, too intent on his coming effort to catch the Speaker's eye, who falls a victim between Abbey and Palace, or a tramp, with the dust of the country on his ragged garments, who falls a victim by Whitechapel Cross. But of whatever rank, or age, or sex the victims may be, it is clear that they only get in the way of hoofs and wheels out of necessity, and that if a means of crossing without danger were provided, the majority of rational people would avail themselves of the chance.

Another thought is suggested by the aspect of a crowded London crossing. Great as is the confusion of the noisy traffic on the surface, greater still, perhaps, is that of the silent traffic below—the network of wires, telegraph and telephone, public and private; of pipes of all kinds: sewers, gas, hydraulic power, water of sorts, to say nothing of pneumatic tubes and other contrivances, each set under the control of a different authority, with a special excavation required and a general diversion of traffic whenever anything goes wrong. We are told that a general system of subways is impracticable; but there is nothing impracticable in constructing subways round all the principal crossings, where wires and pipes as well as traffic are most congested. It would be no great engineering feat to make such a tunnel, without disturbing the surface, where pipes and wires would pass without confusion, accessible at all times for repairs, while the public, passing through a well-lighted corridor supplied with direction tablets showing the opening to each particular street, would go about its business with increased rapidity and in complete security from a street accident.

The alternative plan of bridging over the crossings with light iron bridges has none of these advantages, and indeed as they must be made of considerable height to clear the tops of loaded vans and other tall vehicles, most people would prefer to face the dangers of the street rather than the fatigue of the getting upstairs. It is much

the same at railway stations. Many of us will risk our lives in crossing the line rather than climb an elevated bridge; but a subway draws us in as a flush of water is drawn in by a gutter. And the plan of subways under crossings is one that grows upon the mind the more it is contemplated. They would be rather subterranean halls than tunnels, with conveniences of all kinds, shops and stalls perhaps, and places for a "wash and brush up." Overhead we should faintly hear the continuous roar of the myriad chariots of the mighty city, and at the thought of dangers escaped, we should "lift up our hands" and bless the beneficent power—consul or prætor or tribune of the people—who had saved us from the dangers of the street. But perhaps we shall have to wait till the next century for all this.

MARA.

A STORY IN EIGHT CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER V.

DESMOND BLAKE was not mortally, though badly hurt, and his splendid constitution and iron will together soon began to pull him through his illness, though for a few days his life was despaired of. His intense anxiety to be able to work again helped on his recovery, and as soon as the doctor would permit, he began once more to devote himself to the case he was engaged in, more determined than ever that the murderers should not escape him. Three weeks after his disablement the task was accomplished, and Desmond, after the papers had been fairly started on their way to Dublin, lay back on his pillows, and looked with a smile of relief at his wife.

"There! So ends the hardest case I ever got through. And now to get well and go off for a holiday—with you."

Mara looked up from her book, and smiled, too.

"I am glad you've got it done. I am sure you have worked at it much too hard, you wicked boy."

"Well, I shall do no more now. Tell me where we shall go, Mara. I am sure I could travel in about a week."

She hesitated, and slowly a red flush dyed her face as she bent her head over the book in her hand. No wonder! In her pocket lay a letter received that morning, and its last few lines ran thus:

"Mara, I say it, and I mean it; this can go on no longer. I can no longer endure the deceit, the shame, the treachery to a man who was once my friend. Either come to me and let us brave the world openly, or I must go somewhere—anywhere so that I never look on your face again. But this secret deception is more than I can bear. Tell me, Mara, and tell me soon, which it is to be.

"F. WARDEN."

"I—I don't know, dear," she said at last. "Let us wait till you are stronger, and then we will decide. Shall you mind if I go out, Desmond? I should like a ride so much."

"My darling, of course not. You know I like you to go out. I should be an old bear if I always wanted you to dance attendance on me. Will you take Pat?"

"No. Pat bothers me. Now, Desmond, I won't go if Pat is to be sent after me!" she cried, as Desmond looked doubtful.

"Very well," he said; and not long afterwards he watched through the open window his wife ride rapidly along the road as far as he could see her.

Mara rode on fast; her thoughts in a whirl of confusion, from which she vainly tried to extricate them, and for which the letter in her pocket was responsible. What should she do? What had she meant to do when from their first acquaintance she had encouraged Warden in his evident admiration for her? Would he have ever stepped over that narrow, easily crossed boundary that separates platonic friendship from guilty love if she had not stretched out her hand to help him over it? He would have loved her in any case, she told herself; he had loved her in spite of himself from the very first. And then conscience, that conscience which had so seldom troubled Mara, cried out sternly: "You might have stopped that love, and you did not! You did not!"

Should she go to him? It had seemed so easy sometimes, a thing which many people had done, which so many more would do, but somehow now it looked different. She thought of Desmond, of their married life together, of all he had done for her, of all he had given her. And in spite of all she had never loved him; all that she had given him in return had been a pretence of love which would make the blow harder when her treachery came home to him.

Her horse stumbled over a loose stone, and Mara, absorbed as she was, was nearly

pitched from the saddle. She laughed to herself as she gathered the reins together. Well ! It was too late to draw back now !

She looked round and recognised that she was a long way from home. Near her was a small village, where she and Pat had once been before. They had stopped then at one of the houses for Mara to get some water. She was thirsty now, and turned her horse to the same house to ask for some, and also to rest.

She sat alone in the low, tiny room where they left her, idly wondering what the life of these poor people could be like, when she suddenly heard her husband's name spoken from the room opposite.

"And suppose Blake has finished the case, and you're too late?" said a voice that sounded to Mara oddly familiar.

"Then we'll kill him all the same," came another voice, with a deep oath that made his unsuspected listener shudder. "But he can't have done it. A man can't do much work with a gun-wound in his side. Curses on the shot ! If it had gone to his heart at once we should have been spared to-night's business."

"Will it be to-night ?"

Again Mara noticed the voice, and this time knew of what it reminded her. It was like her husband's voice.

"It will. At twelve o'clock. As sure as I am alive, this is the last day Desmond Blake shall live."

"Hush !" said the other, "Walls have ears. Shut the door."

They did so, and Mara heard no more. She sat on mechanically, only one idea clear in her mind. She must get away at once. She saw, as vividly as though it were being acted before her, the awful scene that would come that night. Those men were in desperate earnest; they would kill Desmond, they would kill her—if she was there. Mara shivered in deadly fear. She would not be there! It must be—flight!

The woman of the house entered, and Mara rose calmly.

"I am quite rested now. I want to know where the nearest railway station is."

It was very near, the woman told her; only a few minutes' ride, and she would reach it. The horse was rested and trotted fast, but Mara urged him on almost to a gallop in her terrified impatience. Suppose there was no train to Longford ! Suppose it had gone ! She could hardly find breath to ask the question of the one porter who came and helped her down from her saddle; but his answer reassured

her. There was a train in a few minutes, and she could reach Longford about two o'clock in the afternoon.

"And what's to be done with the horse ?" the man asked, bewildered at the number of questions that she showered upon him in her agitation.

"I will write you down where he is to sent," she said, taking out a pocket-book. "If you will take him, I will give you five shillings. Will you ?"

The porter signified eagerly that he could, and Mara dropped the money into his hand. A few minutes later she was seated alone in a railway carriage, speeding far away—away from her honour, away from the husband whom she might have saved by a timely warning from the fate which lay before him, but to whom she had hardly given a thought in her selfishness and cowardly fear. The time came soon enough when Mara would have given even that life which was so precious to her to have this day over again, and to act it differently.

It was a quarter past two as the train drew up at Longford Station, and Mara found herself on the old familiar platform. She had drawn a thick veil over her face, and the porters, as she passed quickly by them, did not recognise her. Warden's house was near the station, and gathering up her habit, she walked on towards it.

Into the garden that she and its owner had so often walked in, round to a little side path that had a glass door opening into his library. Would he be there ? She reached the door—yes, writing at the table, his back turned to her, sat her lover. A touch of her shaking hand on the handle, Warden turned round, and, with a spring, gained the door and flung it open.

"My darling ! Is this your answer ? And I never knew you were coming !"

But no answer came. She had fainted in his arms.

"It is nothing," she declared a few minutes later. "Don't be alarmed, Frank."

"I can hardly believe my eyes. Are you, Mara, my own at last, and am I sane and sober ? Mara, tell me how you have come; why you did not let me know ?"

"I could not. Oh, Frank, I have been so frightened. I am still. I can't get over it. I thought I should have died until I decided to come to you. Frank, you must take me away from Ireland."

"I will take you anywhere you like, my darling. But tell me what has been the matter ? He—Blake—has not found out ?"

"Oh, no!" said Mara. "He has never guessed. But, oh, Frank, those men are going to attack our house to-night. They mean to kill Desmond, and they would have killed me if I had not come away."

"Kill Blake! What do you mean?" cried Warden.

And Mara told him all—how she had found out that awful secret; her fear for herself; her final flight from her husband.

Warden listened in silence till she had finished.

"But, Mara, you went home first? You gave him warning?"

"Frank, how could I go home?" cried Mara reproachfully.

"Then you sent a message, Mara," he cried, starting up and speaking hoarsely. "Don't, for Heaven's sake, tell me that you came away here to me without telling any one of what you had heard!"

"But how could I have sent a message? I had only just time to catch my train. Oh, Frank, how strange you are! I thought you would be so glad to see me."

Warden rose from his chair and stood before her, looking down almost in horror on her lovely, beseeching face.

"You are the most heartless woman on the face of this earth," he said slowly and deliberately. "Mara, if any one had told me this story of the worst woman in the world, I should hardly have believed it. You have come away and left that poor fellow, wounded as he is, to his fate, when, had you given warning, he might have been protected by all the constabulary in Kerry by night. And he is your husband. It is too awful! What are you made of, that you could have done such a thing as this?"

Mara was gazing up at him, her large eyes distended with uncomprehending fear.

"Frank," she whispered, "what are you saying? Are you joking, Frank, or mad? I am afraid of you."

"I am not mad any more," said Warden gravely. "I have been mad for the last two months, ever since I saw you, but that is over now. You have sobered me yourself, Mara, and the old madness, when I believed you everything that I must love, can never come back again. Now listen. You will go home to your own house, or rather I shall take you there, and you must stay quietly till I come back to you, as I shall do. It may be to-morrow, it may not be for a few days. Tell no one the truth about your sudden return, Mara. You must tell the servants some lie—what

does it matter what?—to explain it. And meanwhile—"

"And meanwhile?" she gasped. "You—what are you going to do?"

"I am going to your husband," said Warden calmly, beginning to put away in his desk the papers he had been engaged on.

"To Desmond! Why? What shall you do? What shall you say to him? Oh, Frank!" and she rose from the chair and threw herself in Warden's arms; "forgive me! forgive me! I never thought of him; I only thought of you. Can you blame me for loving you too well?"

His face grew white as death as he gently put her away from him. Even now, when he knew her as she was, the passionate love which had cost him so much was crying out to him to forgive her, to take her back to her old place in his heart.

It was this woman's fate to be loved, "not wisely, but too well." The thought crossed Warden's mind then that she was rightly named "Mara." Had she not brought the bitterness of soul that is worse than death to all who loved her?

"It is no use," he said sadly. "This is the end of all, Mara, the end. Would to Heaven I could die with it! I can say no more. Let me go. I am going to try and save him. Even now I may be in time."

In vain were Mara's tears, in vain her prayers for forgiveness, her entreaties for his love. She knew as he left her that this was indeed the end of all.

CHAPTER VI.

THE sun had set, and dusk was coming on fast, as Warden walked rapidly through the little Kerry village in search of Desmond Blake's house. He found it without difficulty, and in answer to his knock Pat came to the door.

"So it's you!" he said, with a scowl of dislike. Servants are proverbially more far-seeing than their masters, and though Desmond had no suspicion of his wife's flirtation with Warden, Pat knew it well.

Warden came into the hall, shut the door, and drew Pat by the arm into the nearest room.

"Now look here, Pat," he said firmly, "you dislike me, and you've got good reason, too, for you're a true friend to your master; but for his sake you'll trust me now. These men who did their best to kill him three weeks ago mean to try it again, and they don't want to fail a second time. They are coming here to-night,

and you know best whether you're ready for them or not."

He waited for an answer; but Pat was looking at him in breathless silence, and he went on :

" You must go at once to the barracks, and tell them what I have told you. All the available men must come here, and as soon as possible, for at what time this attack is to be made I don't know."

" They've chosen their day well, anyhow," said Pat grimly. " There's half the men in barracks gone to-day to Tralee. If we'd only known this morning, we could have kept some of them here. Oh, Mr. Warden, sir, and there's the master ill already! They'll be the end of him this time."

Warden ground his teeth. " Not if we can help it! Go, there's no time to lose."

" I will, sir. How did you hear it, sir? "

" Never mind how I heard it. Where is your master? I will tell him of this—and other things, if you'll show me his room."

" One word, sir! The mistress? Master's half wild about her, she hasn't come home yet! Do you know anything? "

" I do. She is safe. Can't you go at once, man, or must I myself? "

Suddenly Desmond's voice came shouting from upstairs. " Pat, who is that at the door? Didn't I tell you to let me know at once? "

" You did, sir. It's all right, sir," called Pat, and the next moment he was on his way to the barracks; while Warden slowly went upstairs, feeling that there was not a man in the world with whom he would not gladly change places at this moment.

Desmond started up in utter surprise as he entered the room. " Warden! What brings you here, of all men? "

" I've come to see you," said Warden gravely, as he shut the door and sat down near the bed. " No, I can't shake hands, Blake. You'll know why, presently."

" In Heaven's name, why not? Warden, I hardly know where I am, or what I am doing. I'm mad with anxiety about my wife. She—"

" Your wife is safe. It is about her partly that I have come to speak to you."

" Safe! Thank Heaven! But what do you know of her? Tell me where she is! You met her? You have seen her? "

" I have just come from her. Blake," he went on, leaning one arm on the bed, and shielding his face with his hand, " I don't know how to tell you. It's a long story, but I can't go through the whole of it. I must blurt it out! I love your wife, and she fled to me to-day to Longford! "

There was a long silence, and the heavy beats of each man's heart could almost be heard in the unnatural stillness. Then Desmond found his voice.

" You infernal scoundrel! How dare you come to me, and tell me that lie? Oh, if I were a man, just for one hour again, instead of a useless log! "

" I am an infernal scoundrel!" said Warden. " I've behaved like a blackguard to you, Blake, but there's worse I've got to tell you."

" Worse!" echoed Desmond. " Man, do you know what my wife was to me, that you can say there is anything worse than—that? But it's a lie! Oh, Heaven, I know it's a lie! She couldn't do it! Liar! Scoundrel! What fiend inspired you to come to me with such a fool's tale as that? " He paused for a moment to collect his thoughts, to try and realise the full meaning of what had been told him. Could it be true? Something in Warden's attitude, the expression on his down-bent face, brought the truth home to him. There was a long silence, and at last Desmond spoke quietly: " You said there was worse to tell me. Let me hear it. "

Warden drew his breath hard. How was he to tell the extent of heartlessness that Mara had shown?

" The other thing that I came to tell you is, that these men who had a try for your life when you were wounded will come here to-night. They mean to have your life if they can. I have done all I could. Pat has now gone to get together all the men possible."

Desmond was looking at him calmly; he hardly seemed to have heard the danger that threatened him.

" Coming to-night! " he said. " How did you find out? " he asked sharply.

" Don't ask me how I found it out! " cried Warden, rising from his chair and speaking passionately. " I can't tell you how I found it out. But it is true, I believe. Oh, Blake," he went on, coming closer up to him, " I've behaved shamefully to you, I've deceived you, and betrayed you, but I would give my life now, if it were possible, to save you from this."

" Sit down! " said Desmond sternly. " Do you think I care for my life without—her? Do you think anything else matters one straw when all I can think of is that she has gone from me? Let the brutes come, let them kill me if they will! Yes, I do believe you, Warden. I do believe that you would save me now if you could.

But how did you find this out? I must know. I will know!"

"I can't tell you," repeated Warden.

"You shall tell me. Stay," he cried, and then stopped short, and looked at the other with an agony of apprehension in his face. "Great Heavens! She did not know. She did not leave me here to die with no warning to prepare when she knew. Warden, tell me, she did not?"

Warden did not answer. His face was hidden in his hands, but Desmond knew by his silence that he had guessed rightly. Into those few moments that followed seemed to be compressed the sorrow and suffering of a lifetime. Disillusionment comes to most of us, though in the generality of cases we awake to it gradually, and the pain of it is dulled; but to Desmond it had come suddenly and completely—the end of all love, all hope, all interest.

"I understand now," he said presently. "And how did Mara know of it?"

"She overheard it," said Warden.

"Yes, and then she took the first train to Longford, I suppose. Is she there now?"

"She is in her own house," Warden answered in the same dull, mechanical tone as before.

"What time is it?" Desmond asked.

"Nine o'clock."

"And when is this attack to come off? Do you know?"

"I don't know precisely. I believe about midnight."

"Then we have time yet. Warden, are you going back now—to her?"

"No; I am going to stay here. If you turn me out of doors, I'll fight those blackguards on the doorstep. It's the only reparation I can make to you."

Desmond looked at him for a moment half doubtfully.

"I ought to thank you," he said. "I do thank you. Warden, you have behaved badly to me. If I could have killed you a short time ago I should have done it; but you've acted like a man now, and I respect you for it."

The young man raised his head, and for the first time looked the other in the face.

"Thank you for saying that. Some day, perhaps, I shall begin to respect myself again."

"You said you loved her," Desmond went on. "Does she love you?"

"She said she did, but—Blake, for Heaven's sake say no more!"

"I hear Pat at the door. Will you leave me now, and at ten o'clock send him to me? I can't get up alone, I'm afraid."

Warden started in amazement.

"Get up! What on earth are you thinking of? You must do no such thing!"

"You don't imagine that I'm going to stay here and let you brave fellows fight my battles, do you?" said Desmond. "I shall get up, of course, and meet them; shall tell them that they are too late, for the papers are gone. Then they may kill me if they like; what does it matter?"

"Blake, don't do it!" said Warden earnestly. "Even if you don't care for your life, you've no right to fling it away."

Desmond shook his head.

"Do you think I could lie here and let you fight for me? It's no use, Warden, I couldn't do it. I must face them myself. And, after all, I'm not so weak as you think. My arm is strong enough still. Now go, I want to be alone for a time. Barricade all the doors and windows so that they can't sneak in without our knowing."

Warden promised, and went away with a heavy heart. Well did he know that the man who had once been his friend, and whom now he would have died to serve, would never come out of this fight alive!

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